

having a holder for a writing implement rise from the bottom end at an angle to the top end.

On page 7, line 11, replace the existing paragraph to read: There is depicted in FIGURE 1 an apparatus 1 to be used to aid in the signing and protection of a baseball 6 or other sports memorabilia article while on the field of play. The apparatus 1 is preferably to be constructed from plastic; however, any other type of durable material may be used. The main body of the apparatus 1 consists of a central portion 2 from which two flanges 3 project outwardly laterally. The central portion 2 is hollowed out at ends 2a to form a space to accept a baseball 6 or other appropriately sized sports memorabilia article. The apparatus 1 has top and bottom ends 4 and 4a which extend the entire length of the central portion 2 and the lateral flanges 3. The top and bottom ends 4 and 4a each bear a slight lip 4c visible in FIGURE 5. As a baseball 6 under Major League Baseball rules can have a circumference of no less than 9 inches (") and no greater than 9.25", the hollowed-out space in the central portion 2 must measure no greater or lesser than these dimensions, and also the top and bottom ends 4 and 4a are to have a greater circumference than these dimensions in order to best carry out the objectives of the present invention. Additionally, while the hollowed-out space in the central portion 2 may be completely flush with the baseball 6 or other

articles in some embodiments, other embodiments may be sized to permit slight rotation of the article enveloped therein, which allows for an autographing player to spin the ball to find the best surface on which to sign. Finally, in this general embodiment of the invention, a hole 5 is to be provided in one of the lateral flanges 3 to accept a writing implement such as a pen (undepicted).

On page 9, line 23, replace the existing paragraph to read: An additional embodiment of the invention is depicted in FIGURES 11 and 12. In this embodiment, the top end 4 of the main body of the apparatus 1 is proportionately longer than the corresponding bottom end. The top end 4 bears a flange 15 to provide further leverage for the signing player's gripping fingers. Also the lip 4c of both the top end 4 and the bottom end 4a flare outwardly at an angle of 15° to the flat upper surface of each end. The bottom end 4a of the main body of the apparatus 1 is asymmetrically concavely curved, flattening out to become parallel with the top end 4. At the end underneath the flange 15 on the top end 4, an additional flange 16 is provided to give further leverage to the autographing player while signing the article of sports memorabilia 6. Parallel to the hole 5 in the top end 4 of the main body of the apparatus 1, a cylindrical holder 17 to accept a writing implement 7 arises upwardly towards the top end 4. This holder 17 may be formed

directly from the material forming the body of the bottom end 4a, or otherwise affixed to this material. Also, the holder 17 may be at a slight angle to the top end 4, such as at -2°, rather than rising perpendicularly upwardly. As evident in FIGURE 11, the top end 4 of the main body of the apparatus 1 projects laterally outwardly from the hole 5 accepting the writing implement 7 a distance greater than the distance of the bottom end 4a projecting laterally outwardly from the edge of the holder 17. Also, only the upper portion of the baseball 6 or other article of sports collectible memorabilia is visible, projecting outwardly from the top end 4. In an undepicted embodiment, however, the baseball 6 may project slightly from the bottom end, and in yet another undepicted embodiment, one edge of the top end 4 may be slightly beveled to allow the apparatus to stand on this end for display purposes.

On page 12, line 14, replace the existing paragraph to read: Turning ~~finally~~ to FIGURE 17, the apparatus 1 may also bear graphical information like lettering 14 or logos for advertising, identification, or other informational uses on the central portion 2 or on the top 4 or bottom 4a ends (not pictured). Such graphical information may be printed, etched, embossed from the molded plastic of the apparatus 1, or by any other means known to practitioners in the art.

On page 12, line 21, add the following paragraph: Finally, in FIGURE 18, the apparatus 1 is depicted as suggested in FIGURE 5, having the lips 4c of both the top end 4 and the bottom end 4a flare outwardly at an angle of 15° to the flat upper surface of each end and having the hole 5 for the writing implement 7 at a slight angle, such as at -2°, from the top end 4 to the bottom end 4a.

Please add the following claims:

1. An apparatus to be used to aid in the signing and protection of a baseball or other appropriately-sized article of sports memorabilia while on the field of play, comprising:

a main body of the apparatus, comprising:

a central portion hollowed out to form a space to accept a baseball or other appropriately sized sports memorabilia article,

said central portion having two flanges project outwardly laterally,

said central portion and lateral flanges having top and bottom ends extending the entire length of the central portion and the lateral flanges,

said top and bottom ends each bearing a slight lip;

and a hole drilled through the main body to accept a writing implement.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the apparatus is constructed from plastic.

3. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the top and bottom ends of the main body of the apparatus are circular in shape.

4. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the hollowed-out space in the central portion of the main body of the apparatus has a circumference of no less than 9 inches (") and no greater than 9.25".

5. The apparatus of claim 4, wherein the top and bottom ends of the main body of the apparatus have a circumference greater than that of the hollowed-out space.

6. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the lateral flanges of the central portion are tapered concavely at their outer edges.

7. The apparatus of claim 6, wherein the bottom end of the apparatus is to remain parallel with the top end along their entire length.

8. The apparatus of claim 6, wherein the bottom end of the apparatus is tapered concavely inwardly towards the top end, thereby defining two bottom flanges projecting outwardly downwardly from the lateral flanges.

9. The apparatus of claim 8, wherein the total height of the apparatus remains as that in claim 7.

10. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the hole for the writing implement is drilled through one of the lateral flanges.

11. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the hole for the writing implement is drilled through the top and bottom ends and the central portion of the main body of the apparatus.

12. The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising graphical information provided on the central portion or on the top or bottom ends of the main body of the apparatus.

13. The apparatus of claim 13, wherein the graphical information to be provided on the apparatus is so provided from means selected from a group consisting of printing, etching, or embossing from the molded plastic of the apparatus.

14. An apparatus to be used to aid in the signing and protection of a baseball or other appropriately-sized article of sports memorabilia while on the field of play, comprising:

two symmetric pieces of the main body of the apparatus,
said symmetric pieces being formed from the division of the main body of the apparatus along its horizontal equator,

each symmetric piece comprising a central portion hollowed out to form a space to accept a baseball or other appropriately sized sports memorabilia,

said central portion having two flanges project outwardly laterally,

said central portion and lateral flanges having an outer and equatorial edges extending the entire length of the central portion and the lateral flanges;

a depression at the equatorial edge which, when the symmetric pieces are united, forms a hole through which a writing implement may be inserted;

a plurality of locking flanges projecting upwardly from the equatorial edge,

each locking flange bearing a locking arm;

and a plurality of complementary locking spaces into which each locking flange from the other symmetric piece is inserted,

each locking space having a locking arm space into which each locking arm may be inserted.

15. The apparatus of claim 14, wherein the apparatus is constructed from plastic.

16. The apparatus of claim 14, wherein the outer edge of each symmetric piece is circular in shape.

17. The apparatus of claim 14, wherein the hollowed-out space in the central portion of each symmetric piece has a circumference of no less than 9" and no greater than 9.25".

18. The apparatus of claim 17, wherein the outer edge of each symmetric piece has a circumference greater than that of the hollowed-out space.

19. The apparatus of claim 14, wherein the lateral flanges of the central portion of each symmetric piece are tapered concavely at their outer edges.

20. The apparatus of claim 19, wherein the outer edge of one symmetric piece is to remain parallel with the outer edge of the other symmetric piece along their entire length.

21. The apparatus of claim 19, wherein the outer edge of one symmetric piece is tapered concavely inwardly relative to the outer edge of the other symmetric piece, thereby defining two bottom flanges projecting outwardly downwardly from the lateral flanges.

22. The apparatus of claim 21, wherein the total height of the apparatus remains as that in claim 19.

23. The apparatus of claim 14, wherein the hole for the writing implement is drilled through the outer and equatorial edges of each symmetric piece.

24. The apparatus of claim 14, further comprising graphical information provided on the central portion or on the outer edges of the symmetric pieces.

25. The apparatus of claim 14, wherein the graphical information to be provided on the apparatus is so provided from means selected from a group consisting of printing, etching, or embossing from the molded plastic of the apparatus.

26. An apparatus to be used to aid in the signing and protection of a baseball or other appropriately-sized article of sports memorabilia while on the field of play, comprising:

top and bottom pieces of the main body of the apparatus having outer and upper edges formed from the division of the main body of the apparatus along its horizontal equator,

said top and bottom pieces each having a tongue and corresponding groove along its horizontal equator and a central portion hollowed out to form a space to accept the article,

said top and bottom pieces also each flaring outwardly laterally along their outer edges at an angle to their upper edges,

said top piece further having a flange projecting outwardly laterally from one end situated 180° from a hole drilled through the body of the top piece to accept a writing implement,

said bottom piece being asymmetrically concavely curved relative to the top piece,

said bottom piece further having a flange projecting outwardly laterally from one end directly underneath the flange of the top piece situated 180° from a cylindrical holder piece to accept a writing implement,

said holder piece rising upwardly towards the hole in the top piece.

27. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the apparatus is constructed from plastic.

28. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the outer edge of the top and bottom pieces is circular in shape.

29. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the hollowed-out space in the central portion of the top and bottom pieces has a circumference of no less than 9" and no greater than 9.25".

30. The apparatus of claim 29, wherein the outer and upper edges of the top and bottom pieces have a circumference greater than that of the hollowed-out space.

31. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the cylindrical holder is formed from the upper surface of the bottom piece.

32. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the cylindrical holder is a separate component affixed to the upper surface of the bottom piece.

33. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the cylindrical holder rises perpendicularly upwardly towards the hole in the top piece.

34. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the cylindrical holder rises at an angle to the hole in the top piece.

35. The apparatus of claim 26, further comprising graphical information provided on the central portion, on the upper edge of the top piece, or on the outer edges of the top and/or bottom pieces.

36. The apparatus of claim 35, wherein the graphical information to be provided on the apparatus is so provided from means selected from a group consisting of printing, etching, or embossing from the molded plastic of the apparatus

37. A method of aiding in the signing and protection of a baseball or other appropriately-sized article of sports memorabilia article while on the field of play, comprising inserting the article into the hollowed-out space of the central portion of the main body of the apparatus of claim 1 and gripping the lateral flanges or the top and bottom ends of the apparatus while signing.

38. A method of aiding in the signing and protection of a baseball or other appropriately-sized article of sports memorabilia while on the field of play, comprising:

inserting the article into the hollowed-out space of the central portion of one of the symmetric pieces of the main body of the apparatus of claim 14;

sliding the other symmetric piece over the article and engaging the locking arms on the locking flanges into the locking arm spaces in the complementary locking spaces, thereby locking the symmetric pieces into the single unitary apparatus;

and gripping the lateral flanges or the top and bottom ends of the apparatus while signing.

39. A method of aiding in the signing and protection of a baseball or other appropriately-sized article of sports memorabilia while on the field of play, comprising:

inserting the article into the hollowed-out space of the central portion of one of the symmetric pieces of the main body of the apparatus of claim 26;

depressing the top and bottom pieces of the main body of the apparatus together such that the tongues on the top and bottom pieces enter the complementary grooves on the top and bottom pieces;

and gripping the lateral flanges or the top and bottom ends of the apparatus while signing.

40. (new) The apparatus of claim 8, wherein the bottom flanges project outwardly at an angle of 15° .

41. (new) The apparatus of claim 11, wherein the hole for the writing implement is drilled at a -2° angle through the top and bottom ends of the apparatus.

42. (new) The apparatus of claim 21, wherein the bottom flanges project outwardly at an angle of 15° .

43. (new) The apparatus of claim 23, wherein the hole for the writing implement is drilled at a -2° angle through the outer and equatorial edges of each symmetric piece.